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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that educators are vitally interested in literary moments that engage the reader instantly, this paper discusses books that provide enjoyment for children. After suggesting that the most important "basics" are those that promote an exploration of language through literature, the paper notes the importance of good literature programs and praises current efforts by the National Assessment of Educational Progress to assess students' attitudes toward reading and literature. It then describes numerous children's books that provide enjoyment in the following areas: humor; learning something new; being a part of long ago and far away; nostalgia; exploration of inner space; dreaming, imagining, and developing; and language. Passages from some of the books are presented to illustrate their appeal for children. The paper concludes by mentioning the connections between literature and composition. (GT)

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Virginia M. Reid

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

From a Midrash, a song of children from an anthology of the classical
Kabbalah:

Enjoying the Red Camelias

of Children's Literature

Feb. 16, 1979
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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"It is said the newborn sing holy songs upon arriving into new
light.

"They are blind for several days because they watch creation's
lights fade from within. They watch the sky upon their eyelids wash-
ed clean of stars and moons and comets whose tails spark letters and
numbers and notes of music.

"For many days they are deaf as the voice within gives way to
the voices outside. It takes some time for the child to speak words
that link him to our language. By that time he is fully born on
earth . . .

"It is said a child lives like an acrobat, a tumbler, in constant
motion with no sense of time's gravity. Leaping and dancing from
sunrise to sunset, he engages instantly with what the moment brings."

We who are in the business of education are vitally interested in
moments which "engage" the reader instantly because, as Molly Hunter
puts it, "If you can read, you can educate yourself." If you have not
read her two-part article, "If You Can Read," in the June and August
issues of Horn Book, I urge to do so. When asked what influences
have there been on you as a writer, she credits a fluency in reading,
a great love of words, and an ear for the "fall of language."

1. Back to Basics?

You've heard the expression? Well, Molly Hunter doesn't use it.
although her underlying theme is a plea for back-to-A-Basic understand-
ing of language and the successive peaks of language, which are reach-
ed through literature.

My dean, Dean James L. Jarret of the School of Education, Univer-
sity of California at Berkeley, has circulated to Education Extension
staff members a bulletin entitled, "I'm for Basics, But Let Me Define

Them." His remarks are excerpted from his article in the Phi Delta Kappan, December, 1977. Dean Jarret defines the basics for elementary children thusly:

"The important thing is that the student early and continuously recognizes school as an institution ready to help, one that will help him, frequently, assess his own progress and deficiencies, indicate what these mean in terms of the future, and provide instruction for getting on. For the main part, elementary schooling should be devoted to what Whitehead calls the romantic rhythmic phase, that is, an exploration of the wonders and riches of the world, the long ago and the far away no less than the near at hand. There will come a time for details and precision and exactness: prematurely forced, they may sour the school experience. As one of my colleagues has put it, the one absolute requirement we can and must make of the elementary school is that it leave the pupil not less inclined to go to school, to enjoy and be stimulated by it, than it found him originally . . ."

2. What About Literature?

Certainly this implies to me a strong purpose for providing an excellent literature program. Unfortunately, literature programs in elementary schools have been few and far between. By program, I mean a well planned continuing experience with books in addition to textbooks. I mean also a constant exposure to literature which not only encourages children to read but which develops new interests, skills, and appreciation needed to enjoy fully the literature they hear and read.

Many times in my long career as a teacher and consultant to teachers, I've observed that unless some subject is tested, it is not taught but, obviously, there are important educational objectives for which we have no effective measures.

One step in the right direction, it seems to me, is the new direction N.A.E.P. is taking to combine the National Assessment of Reading and Literature. Michael J. Noe, N.A.E.P. research analyst, says, "The rationale for such a move is the recognition that the same processes are involved in reading all types of material, both literary and non-literary. Whether the passage the student reads is short or

long, taken from a story or from a can of cat food, the student's grasp of the meaning of words, of sentences, of sentences in context, and of paragraphs is still being assessed."

"Students in 1979-1980 will be assessed for more than their comprehension of words, sentences, and paragraphs, however. They will be tested as well for the value they place on reading and literature--the first time this attitude has been formally measured by N.A.E.P. Valuing will be cut in two parts" Noe explained, "with an attempt to measure the value the student places on reading and literature as they pertain to self and as they relate to the culture." Do students value literature as a source of enjoyment? As a means of developing self-understanding and personal goals? As a means of understanding human beings and the diversity of culture? These are some of the questions the new survey will address.

"The literature assessment in particular will have a new direction in 1979. Previously, students were asked to identify characters and literary works in order to 'prove' their literary appreciation. The test now being prepared takes a different view of the topic, however. Students will be asked to read passages of literature and answer questions that require analysis and evaluation of the text," explained Robert Larson, director, development analysis, and research at N.A.E.P. In earlier tests, some children might not have been able to answer the questions at all because they hadn't read the 'right' books."

3. What Are the Right Books?

In a syllabus prepared for the UC Independent Study (correspondence) class I teach, the students are asked right off the bat what is a good book for children. The answer given in Zena Sutherland's text is, "A good book for children is one they can read and enjoy." I'll accept her definition if by reading you include reading pictures.

"Enjoy, enjoy." Enjoyment is of many kinds:

- a. The most obvious is laughing at the humor. Remember how primary children laughed at The Stupids Step Out (2)? One of the things which amused them the most was the text under the framed pictures on the wall. A picture of a tree is

labelled "flower;" a picture of a flower is labelled "tree."

"Who are you?" asked Grandfather.

"I'm your son, Stanley," said Mr. Stupid.

"Mother, your new hat is meowing."

"Of course it is, Buster," said Mrs. Stupid. "I'm wearing the cat."

Then there's Time to Get Out of the Bath, Shirley by John Burningham. Show how Mother asks Are You Listening to Me Now, Shirley and proceeds to ignore the child. Meanwhile, Shirley has all manner of exciting fantasy adventures.

One of the easy-to-reads, Morris and Boris (3), is a great springboard to laughter and to the understanding of riddles:

"Boris the Bear met Morris the Moose. Do you like riddles?" asked Boris. Morris asked, Do you drink them?

Boris said, You do not eat riddles. You do not drink riddles. You ask them! Listen--I will ask you a riddle.

Boris asked, What has four feet . . . Morris yelled, ME!

I did not finish, Boris said. What has four feet and a tail and flies?

. . . ME! Morris yelled.

I still did not finish! Boris cried. Let me finish! Morris put a hoof over his mouth. Boris asked, What has four feet and a tail and flies?

ME! Morris yelled. I have four feet and a tail, and flies come and sit on me all the time!

No, no! Boris growled. The answer is: A horse in an airplane!

One of the new books by Peter Spier, Oh Were They Ever Happy (4), which is lots of fun for the kids, and sure to surface memories for any parent who has come home to a well-intentioned surprise. These parents came home to find their house painted all colors.

Intermediate students laugh at the tall tales of Sid Fleischman. Many of his tall, tall tales feature Josh McBroom, but his latest hero is a rural boy who tells the story of Me and the Moon-eyed Horse (5). His sister, Elvira, gives a look that would "sour a pail of milk" and his grandfather uses his false teeth to send him a telegraphic message,

"U get out fast!" for upper elementary children

Unfortunately, I find few titles this year which compare in humor with Harriet the Spy, Freaky Friday, Million for Boris but, fortunately, though, "the books are old, the children are new," as Annis Duff said years ago.

There are social-situation books like Betsy Byars', The Pinballs (6), the story of three formerly abused children in a warm, loving foster home. But it has a wry, even bitter, humor at times.

Carlie, the hard-boiled heroine, had made a list of all the things she was: "Wonderful, Exciting, Temptatious" Harvey, too, was making a list. "Bad things that Have Happened to ME." Carlie said, "Mine's going to be called, Big Events and How I Gpt — Cheated Out of Them." She asks Harvey, "What else is on your 'Bad Things' list?"

"Nothing. I've just got the appendectomy so far."

"Well, write down two broken legs," Carlie suggested. "I wouldn't exactly call them the fun event of the year." She paused. "If it was me, I'd make that number two and three, wouldn't you, Thomas J? Number ~~two~~ ^{one}, right leg. Number two, left."

The child who hates to write might be tempted to write lists like "Gifts I Didn't Want," "Things I Hate to Eat," etc. All of these books are great springboards to story dramatization, role playing, and Reader's Theater.

b. Enjoyment of Learning Something New

Among the current crop of books, this could be Banchek's Snake In, Snake Out (7), which is intended as a concept book but also provides enjoyment as the reader notes the snakes' positions to demonstrate in, out, under, around, etc.

A new photographic essay came to me this last fall. It is Butcher. Baker, Cabinetmaker (8): Photographs of Women at Work. It is by Abigail Heyman and Wendy Saul, published by Thos. Crowell. According to the foreward, "This is a book about women who work. Can you think of work you have seen women do?" it asks readers.

Since the photos show women in jobs traditionally held by men, this book should provide a springboard to a lively discussion. A few

other current books which help to provide the pleasure of knowing are:

- Dowden, State Flowers (9)
Parnell, Dog's Book of Birds (10)
Craig, The Wounded Wolf (11)

c. Enjoying Being a Part of Long Ago and of Far Away

Thanks to the Centennial, Jean Fritz and others have provided us with light humorous easy-to-understand bits of American history:

- Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May? (12)
Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? (13)
Who's That Stepping on Plymouth Rock? (14) to name just a few.

Miriam Bourne's What Is Papa Up to Now? (15) is Ben Franklin as seen through the eyes of his ^{first} daughter, Sally. Phoebe and the General (16) by Judith Griffin, published in '77, is the story of a young freed slave girl sent by her father to spy on Washington's staff in the Queen's Head now known as Francis Tavern in New York.

Middle school students will enjoy Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence: The writing and editing of the Document that Marked the Birth of the United States of America, written by James Murves (17).

In addition to the various fine books of non-fiction, the reader has many opportunities to visit other cultures through folk tales. It's hard to choose titles from the many available, but I will name three because they are specially valuable as resources to teachers and students interested in using puppets and masks as responses to literature.

The Flying Horses: Tales from China (18), a collection of many folk tales and historical stories from the deep past to the present. These stories, complete with verses in Chinese style, can be brought to life by rod puppets, or human puppets, miming actions as the narrator does the storytelling.

If you who were as enthralled as I with the EB film, The Loon's Necklace (19), you will thank Oxford for publishing the retelling of this Indian tale of the blind man who regains his sight with the help

of the loon. Just as in the film, students can use masks for their telling of the tale. by Byrd Baylor

They Put on Masks (20) shows all kinds of Indian and Esquimo masks, their significance, and their power to make the wearer be anything he chooses to be. It closes by asking the reader, "Now think what kind of mask your mask would be. And think what kind of songs that mask would bring out of you . . . and what strange unknown dances your bones would remember and what you would ask and what you would promise. Now think what kind of mask your mask would be."

Choral speaking of the verses would be a fitting and dramatic pairing.

d. The Enjoyment of Nostalgia

Most children pounce on each new Beverly Cleary book the moment it appears. They are delighted with the humor, of course, but they also like to remember thing which happened to them when they were younger. In Ramona the Brave (21) she begs to have a room of her own, but when she gets it, she is afraid to sleep there and invents many excuses. "I can remember when that happened to me," said one 10-year-old, feeling smug and superior now.

"Owl was in bed. It is time to blow out the candle and go to sleep, he said with a yawn. Then Owl saw two bumps under the blanket at the bottom of his bed. What can those strange bumps be? asked Owl. Owl lifted up the blanket. He looked down into the bed. All he could see was darkness. Owl tried to sleep, but he could not. Owl moved his right foot up and down. One of those bumps is moving, said Owl. Owl moved his left foot up and down. The bump on the left moved up and down. The other bump is moving, cried Owl. Owl pulled all of the covers off his bed. The bumps were gone. All Owl could see at the bottom of the bed were his own two feet."

The reader or listener is in on the joke and enjoys Little Owl's not knowing that the bumps were his own feet. Another form of recalling which satisfies is the discovery of old favorites in a new guise. For primary children, Runaway Marie Louise (23) is their old favorite Runaway Bunny with humor added. A new title for 8 and 9-year-olds, Jeremiah in the Dark Woods (24), is a humorous take-off on

many familiar folk and fairy tales as well as of Mother Goose. About Sleeping Beauty, Grandma says, "Goodness, is that one still here? She must be older than I am."

e. Enjoying the Exploration of Inner Space

There are more and more titles in which children can react to stories by exploring their own feelings and self-concepts. My favorite of the new titles for young readers is His Mother's Dog (25). Both boy and dog, jealous of the new baby, find each other in a sensitive story written in poetic prose.

At 11, The Great Gilly Hopkins (26) is nobody's real kid. Readers will cheer her as she copes with the longings and terrors of being a foster child and will rejoice as she finds genuine caring in her new foster family.

Keep Running Allen (27) is not jogging for juniors. Mother told Allen, "Stay with your sister and brothers." But they ran too fast. Robert Bulla gives an eloquent, understated account of Allen's struggle to keep up and of a satisfying thing which happens when he finally stops running.

When We Lived with Pete (28) and Grandpa--and Me (29) are two poignant contemporary books. One deals with the pleasures fatherless Tommy has when he and his mother lived with Pete and how he works to set up a reunion between the adults. The other develops a new and understanding relationship between Kerry and her senile grandfather, which helps her to accept his suicide.

f. Enjoying Dreaming, Imagining and Developing--The Right Side of the Brain

As a counter-movement to the "back-to-basic" push, some researchers are saying that the absence of the Arts programs can retard brain development in children. Roger Williams, in September 3, 1977, issue of Saturday Review, gives strong support to schools who are protesting the cutting of the Arts (frills) from the curriculum. Thirteen was certainly an unlucky number for California children. The passage of Proposition 13 has closed libraries, removed children's librarians from both the school and public libraries. Yet, we still

hear "Why Can't Johnny Read?"

The encouraging of dreaming and stretching of the imagination is of vital importance. I have only time to mention three titles which aid in that stretching:

The Magical Drawings of Mooney B. Finch (30). Little Mooney could and did draw anything the people in the park asked him to draw. But once his "just-in-case" eraser came in handy.

In If the Dinosaurs Came Back (31) a child imagines all the wonderful ways that dinosaurs could be used if only they could come back.

Then there's Would You Rather, also by Burningham who gave us Get Out of the Water, Shirley. Both of which should elicit much creative language from children--oral and written.

The Newbery Award-winning Bridge to Terabithia (32) describes a rare friendship with Leslie, whose folks are comfortable with books and music, and Jess, who is one of a stolid farm family. She learns compassion and compromise from Jess, and he gains insight and self-esteem from Leslie. All this is accomplished through play--dramatic play if you will--as they create the imaginary land of Terabithia where monarchs reign. Beautiful and most deserving of the award.

g. Enjoying Language

In The Little Girl and the Rain from Czechoslovakia children are exposed to the right "fall of language" and to exquisite art to make the mood of the book.

Now listen to the cadence and imagery in The Dancing Man by Ruth Bornstien (Seabury Press, 1978):

4. What About Composition?

I've mentioned literature as a springboard to writing or composing only incidentally, although it could be part of each category. I'll refer you instead to John Stewig's fine professional text, Read to Write (Hawthorne, 1975), in which he helps teachers of all elementary grades to use books to develop characterization, setting, plot, figurative writing, poetry, and reshaping of their writing.

I also want to recommend Using Literature in the Elementary Classroom, edited by John Stewig and Sam Sebesta, and for the effect of literature on the storytelling of pre-schoolers, please. "Flopsy, Mopsy and Tooth" in January, 1979, Language Arts (Read p. 12).

In conclusion, let's return to the Kabbalah:

"It is said a child live like an acrobat, a tumbler, in constant motion, with no sense of time's gravity. Leaping and dancing from sunrise to sunset, he engages instantly with what the moment brings.

"It is said that when a child sings, it is the song we spend the rest of our lives trying to learn, trying to remember."

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